

HOME READINGS OF THE BIBLE.

JOSEPH PARKER.

If I were called upon to advise as to Bible reading at home, my counsel would run thus :

First : *Read the Bible from the end to the beginning.* Read from Christ to Moses. If we were reading for merely literary purposes, we should reverse the process. Fill the mind thoroughly with the spirit of Christ—"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"—then go back with all Christ's light to help you through the twilight and occasional darkness of the earlier reading. By neglecting this process many have lost what little faith they had.

Second : *Read the Bible from the beginning to the end.* You now have the light in hand. You know to what issue all is tending. You can mark the evolution phase by phase. You feel as if present at the rising of the sun. I believe in the organic unity of the Book. Without being superstitious, I often feel as if the organizers of the sacred canon had been actually inspired. Many people ask me if I can recommend a good book in defense of the Bible, and I always answer in the affirmative. That book is the Bible itself. Its self-defense is its best defense.

Third : *Always distinguish between the essential and the accidental.* Why was the Bible written? It was written to bring men to God. Keep that one purpose in view, and you can never go far wrong. The Bible, in its supreme purpose, has simply nothing to do with science, history, wars, or chronology. All these it may or may not make use of as framework ; its purpose, lofty and holy, is to reveal the relation of the loving God to the individual man and the total race. That relation you can find, if you are really intent on the sacred pursuit.

Fourth : *For some time it may be profitable to read almost exclusively the portions of the Bible which you can turn to immediate account.* Critical matter must be left to critics. It is so in science. A man does not necessarily know his own physiology, yet he eats and drinks and in various ways cultivates his strength. Do you the same with the Bible. Leave scholarly minds, and remember that God requires from you to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with himself. It will be easy to find enough in the Bible for the soul to live upon, if the soul really wants to live.

Fifth : *Fix upon certain great principles or doctrines, and then let texts fall into their own places.* Never seek for mere texts. They have played a mischievous part in Christian teaching. Get into the

very spirit of the Bible, and not into any one of its detached portions. Thus, settle in your inmost soul the conviction that GOD IS LOVE. If any text seems to contradict this, the text must stand aside for further consideration. So with other cardinal doctrines : God is righteous ; Jesus Christ died, the just for the unjust ; Jesus rose from the dead. Never mind the conflicting theories about these doctrines—one man explains in this way and another in that way ; you must steadily remember that we are saved by the fact and not by the explanation. "God is Love" is the whole Bible in three syllables.

Sixth : *Do not read the Bible as a critic but as an earnest and open-minded inquirer.* I am speaking of home reading, and especially of reading for spiritual purposes. You want to know what God the Lord will say, and say especially to your heart and soul, as distinguished from what may be called your speculative faculties. Before reading you should pray. You should say : "Lord, open mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law ;" and again : "Open mine understanding, that I may understand the Scriptures." The Holy Spirit alone can lead you into all truth. The Father will give that Blessed Paraclete to all who ask in penitent and humble faith. "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full." Hush all other voices, and listen to the still small voice of the Spirit eternal and condescending.

When we have profitable Bible reading at home, what preaching we shall have ! What listening ! What obedience ! Until we have such reading we shall have debate, vanity, and uncharitableness. O Spirit of the living God, descend upon our families and exalt Thy Book to the position of sovereignty which is its due !

CHRIST'S SAMPLES.

PATSY PRESTON.

One great means for promoting any form of business enterprise is by samples. The ways that men have of bringing these proofs of their wares before the market are myriad. As we move about in town and country, we are pursued by specimen pamphlets and packages of every size and shape ; the postman leaves them at our doors, the small boy thrusts them on us at every turn, until we weary of the persistence of the traffickers.

The other day it suddenly struck me that this is what a Christian is—a sample of the religion of Jesus Christ. If he does not come up to what the world expects, how he damages the business. Samples are made with care to promote the trade ; but professed followers of Christ, I fear,

take upon themselves the name and trademark of the firm, when they are not of it. They are not its genuine work, because they do not bear the special mark of having been washed from sin and quickened unto righteousness.

The samples of soap, or starch, or stuffs, that come from a certain house and are poor, influence, perhaps, an entire section of a town in not trying them further. The same holds good with professed Christians. The world is busy picking flaws in them. How it gloats over their failures and wickednesses, making them an excuse for its own shortcomings. On the other hand, a good article of manufacture strengthens that whole industry, and tempts trials of it. Just so with real interested Christians. In one of our largest colleges recently, one of a number of gay students said of a classmate, "I would not believe there was anything in religion, if it were not for the life that William Winthrop leads. He lives up to his professions." Although scholastic honors were poured into his lap, how this speech outweighed them all in value.

The assayers in Christ's establishment cannot entirely judge whether those are the true metal or not, who are coming forward to be sealed with Christ's seal ; so that we must be very careful to hope that we are worthy of the stamp, before we are branded into the church, that we may not cast discredit upon the cause. Let us not content ourselves, either, with being tolerable Christians, but try to do justice to our Master as fair samples of his work.—*The Westminster Teacher.*

VOLUNTARY CONFESSION.

It becomes evident from a story which is said to have originated in Western New York, that there are widely varying ideas in existence as to what constitutes voluntary testimony on any subject.

"Did I understand you to say that this boy voluntarily confessed his share in the mischief done to the schoolhouse?" asked the judge, addressing the determined-looking female parent of a small and dirty boy who was charged with having been concerned in a recent raid upon an unpopular schoolmaster.

"Yes, sir, he did," the woman responded. "I just had to persuade him a little, and then he told the whole thing, voluntarily."

"How did you persuade him?" queried the judge.

"Well, first I gave him a good licking," said the firm parent, "and then I put him right to bed without any supper, and I took all his clothes away, and told him he'd stay in bed till he told me what he'd done if 'twas the rest of his days, and I should lick him again in the morning. And in less than half an hour, sir, he told me the whole story, voluntarily."